

Shyakh Abdullah Bin Bayyah - Between Ignorance and Extremism

The following is a transcript of Shaykh Hamza Yusuf's live translation of Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah's lecture on 10th February 2006, at Kensington Town Hall, London.

"Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim", the Shaykh said, first praising Allahu subhanahu wa ta'ala, "and also prayers and blessings on the Prophet, seeking refuge in Allahu subhanahu wa ta'ala from Shaytan."

Shaykh Yusuf said that we listened to the Qur'an reciter mention a verse which says in part, "...and the balance that We set down, in order that you not transgress the balance...." "Tonight," he said, "we're going to attempt to really come to an understanding of what the balance is. Before we do that, I want to convey my gratitude to Fuad Nahdi and to these different organizations that have been involved in this because it's a good thing that they've done."

First of all, the topic is about ignorance and extremism, and ignorance and extremism are two sides of the same coin. In fact, we could say that ignorance is actually the primary cause for extremism. This is a time that we are living in, in which Islam unfortunately is under siege, and also those things that we hold most sacred are being attacked, so it's very important that we actually try to consider and think of ways to get out of the current crisis and current situation. In some ways, much of what is happening, if we are critical, we have to come to the conclusion, is in fact partially our own blame.

I'm not saying that we are the cause of what these fools, or whoever these fools who drew these cartoons were. But because we have failed to really explain to people who we are, to let people know what our religion is, what we believe, there are many repercussions from that that we are suffering. In this condition, it's absolutely very important that we attempt to arrive at some solutions to the current crisis and the situation that we find ourselves in. This, here this evening, is actually an attempt to do so. Also, it's very important first that we actually have a sound understanding of our religion before we attempt to convey what it is to other people. Therefore, it's very important that we come to know and understand our own traditions so that we can actually convey them to others.

Brother and sisters, the world today is living in an immense amount of anxiety, some of which is directed towards us. The questions that are being put to us are "Who are we? What do we want? What are we going to do?" Our answer to those questions is that we're Muslims. And we have to ask ourselves then, "What is Islam?" Islam is a state of resignation towards your Lord. It's a state of submission towards Allahu subhanahu wa ta'ala. The Qur'an tells us that Allah calls or invites to the abode of peace. The word peace itself, al-Salam, is one of the names of Allah. The greeting that we have amongst ourselves is peace. So a question that we have to ask ourselves is "How can we introduce a culture of peace?"

Hassan Al Basri, the early scholar and well known tabi'i, follower of the sahaba, said that Islam is between the extreme of neglect and the extreme of excess, that these are both extremes, and that Islam was between the two. Ibn 'Abbad al-Navsi said that the soul

inclines toward extremism both in guidance and in error, so it's part of the nature of the soul to incline towards extremism. Now the way out of that is to understand what are the aims and purposes of the sacred law, what are the aims and purposes of Islam itself. Moderation is something that prevents a human being from falling into this extremism, and therefore it is demanded of the Muslim that they be moderate. But conditions invite to extremism, oppression invites to extremism, and aggression invites to extremism. These things that happen in the world are things that cause people to respond in certain ways, but even though that invitation is there, to go to an extreme, there has to be a constraint on the soul that prevents the soul from doing so. This is why the Qur'an tells us, "Do not allow the hatred of a people to cause you to transgress." Be people of justice because that is closer to piety with Allah. Also the Qur'an says ta'awanu, work together, or cooperate in righteousness and in Godliness, and do not cooperate in sinfulness and in aggression.

In order to prevent a civil strife from breaking out in the sanctuary, the Prophet (saw) actually compromised and chose not to enforce or impose on the polytheists of Mecca with his entrance into the sanctuary even though the Muslims had come to fulfil their lesser pilgrimage, the sacred rights. But the verse was revealed telling the Prophet that it was a good thing that he had done because they were working to preserve the sanctity of the holy places. The Prophet also said that the foundation of our relationship with the other is a foundation of righteousness. It's a foundation of goodness. For that reason Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala says, "Allah does not prohibit you concerning those who do not persecute you, or drive you from your homes, from showing them goodliness and righteousness."

Qadi Abu Bakr Ibn Arabi said that this verse is fully implemented, that it is not abrogated by the verse of the sword like some people have claimed, but rather it is a verse that still has a legal standing and is foundational in our relationship with 'the other'. Our relationship with the other is one of birr, goodness, of righteousness, before anything else, so if there is no aggression then there is no reason to be other than good towards those people. This means honouring them, and also accordingly, birr is the extent of all virtue so it's really goodness in its essence. Even Qadi Abu Bakr said that one of the meanings of birr is to share wealth, that you can actually share your wealth with people of other faiths, of other traditions, and that the Qur'an doesn't prohibit you from doing that.

That's one of the meanings of the verse. Now conditions that are extreme when they arise cause people to lose their balance, but we also have to remember that the Qur'an tells us that these conditions are going to arise. The Qur'an says, "We will test you in yourselves and in your wealth and in hardship, loss of life, loss of property...." - all these things - and it tells us to be patient. It tells us to have Godliness and also it reminds us that if you show patience, if you show Godliness, then that is the essence of this matter, that is the essence of the affair, It's very important that we maintain that understanding in the midst of extreme conditions.

The Shaykh said, "I want to look at some challenges that we are facing." The first challenge is "How do we preserve our religion and our identity as Muslims?" The Qur'an reminds us that when Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala, when his Lord said to Muhammad, "Enter into Islam" he said, "I enter into Islam, aslamtu."

The second challenge is "How do you live in your house as a Muslim?" Isama'il was praised for commanding his family to prayer, and so this is something that you take it upon yourself, as a personal matter, but also it has to translate to your family. How do you transmit your religion to your family? Also, how do you establish your religion in your environment?

How do you preserve religious teachings? We know that the Prophet (saw) said that in order that they may die Muslims, people must hold to this religion even if they have to bite onto the root of a tree to hold onto it. Also, how do we become an excellent example, a mercy, a rain that gives sustenance, a rain that brings the earth back to life and provides foliage for the creatures to sustain themselves, not a hurricane that comes and damages and creates destruction in its path?

Look at the hadith of one of the sahaba whose name was Fudaik. This man became Muslim and was living with people who weren't Muslim. He decided to make hijra. But when he told his people that he was going to make hijra to the Prophet (saw), they said, "You're a good man. All of us respect you. You're somebody that takes care of people. We don't want you to leave, we want you here. We want you to be part of our society." So Fudaik went to the Prophet (saw) and he told him his situation. The Prophet (saw) said, "Establish the prayer, pay zakat, abandon anything foul, and live amongst your people wherever you want." The narrator of the hadith, Ibn Hubban, said, "I think he also said, 'If you do that you'll be a muhajar. It's as if you've migrated.' " So basically what the Prophet (saw) was saying was, "Be a British citizen. Be a citizen wherever you are." Just be, and if they are not preventing you from practicing your religion, that hadith is permission from the Prophet to live amongst a people. But look at the conditions that he put upon Fudaik (that he prayed, that he paid his zakat, but also that he avoided wrongs and didn't do anything evil because he has to be a mercy and that's why it's very important for him to be an example).

The Shaykh mentioned that yesterday he gave a talk at the House of Lords on 'how a law is made in Islam.' There was a Christian man in there who he doesn't know, but he thinks might have been a lawyer. The Christian man asked him about the Muslim fatwa that was issued by some of the 'ulema here. The 'ulema had said that the reason 7/7 was haram was because people here had entered into a trust, or a social contract of security, and if you have a contract of security then you are obliged to follow that law and not to break it. The man said that he was troubled by this idea, that that's the reason it was prohibited. He had asked, "What about the innocence of the people that were involved?" The Shaykh said that was a good point and that's why he had brought this issue to attention, but that the fact they were innocent is just one of the reasons why it was prohibited. The Shaykh had mentioned the aman, or this contract of security that we're bound to follow, was to emphasize the fact that we are bound by the law of the land. That was very important, he said. We need to remember that.

One of the problems that we have is that we have a misunderstanding of jihad. Our concept of jihad has to be rectified. If you look at the verses that came down about jihad, you'll find the first one revealed, called Ayat-ul-jihad, granted permission for those who were oppressed. These were people who were being religiously persecuted. We could say in the parlance of the modern era that their freedom of religion was not being allowed and so they were given permission to defend themselves.

The second verse that was revealed was a verse that called into question people's lack of defense for other people that were being oppressed. It said, "What's wrong with you that you don't defend and struggle (fi sabil illah, fight; fi sabil illah, to defend) those who are oppressed amongst the men, women, and children, and asking Allah to give a guardian or a protector?" Finally, the verse was revealed to fight in the way of Allah against those who fight you, but do not be the aggressor. "Allah reminds us, even within these verses," the Shaykh said. "If you look at them, you'll find, for instance, that there is no blame on people who fight to defend themselves. But, the verses immediately following, about those who

forgive and rectify, that Allah loves the people that do that, we find that that's a good thing to do. Also the Prophet (saw), when given permission by Allah (s.w.t.) for parity in battle, was told, "Just as they oppose you, you may oppose them," but immediately it's followed up by saying, "but if you show patience, and if you overlook and forgive, that is better for those who do that."

So if we look at what the Prophet (saw) is teaching us, these lessons are also being taught in the Qur'an. One of the things, for example, the Shaykh said that the Prophet (saw) taught us, is what they call today anger management. He said that if you are standing and you get angry, then sit down. If you are sitting and you get angry, then lie down. And if you're lying down and you're still angry, go do wudu. That, he said, was a necessary process of controlling one's anger because otherwise allowing anger to take over your state is a very unhealthy thing to do. That's something for all of us to think about.

The Shaykh said that jihad has a broader meaning than fighting, and it shouldn't be limited to that meaning. Ibn Taymiyya's definition for jihad was any good action, any action that was virtuous. That was actually his definition for jihad and it's mentioned by the 'ulema. When it talks about war, the Qur'an says, specifically, "harb." It says, "Until the war sets down all of its burdens." That's talking about an actual physical conflict. So the word in Arabic, when it's used for the conflict of war, is *qital*, not jihad. Jihad has a broader meaning, and all of its full meanings should be incorporated when we say the word jihad instead of specifically meaning it to be some martial event because that's not correct. For instance, somebody again in the meeting the other night asked the Shaykh if he thought it was a jihad to elect good officials. He said that yes, this would go under the category of the good actions (people that are doing good things, that are supporting the truth, that are supporting just causes). That's mercy. The Prophet (saw) said that the Qur'an makes it clear he was only sent as a mercy to all the worlds. So people that are doing good things for others, those are people who are doing acts of mercy that encompass everybody. If you look at the Qur'an and the hadith, you will find that humanity is included in many of these hadith. For instance, the Prophet (saw) said the best and most beloved of you in the eyes of God are those who are most beneficial to the servants or dependents of God. The Qur'an says, "Speak beautifully to humanity," to *al-nas*, which is the word for humanity.

The Prophet (saw) also told people, "...and treat people well...." and again, the Shaykh said, you should notice he used the word *nas*, which means human beings in general. When the Prophet (saw) was visited by a delegation of Christians from Nejran, they came into the masjid, the Prophet met them in his masjid. When their time for prayer came, the sahaba did not want them to pray in the masjid because the masjid was for the Muslims, their area of worship. But the Prophet (saw) permitted them to pray in the masjid. This is mentioned by Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham in their *sira*. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya said about this event, the reason for this approval, was that the Christians were not going to do this every Sunday. Rather, it was for a specific time, and so if the same situation arose in another time and place, he felt that it should be permitted also because it wasn't a habitual practice, it was just something out of necessity. We can see this also with Sayyidina 'Umar (radi Allahu anhu) when the Prophet (saw) dealt with some Ethiopians who were dancing in the masjid. Sayyidina 'Umar wanted to take some stones and throw them at the Ethiopians to get them to stop, but the Prophet (saw) told him, "Leave them alone. This is *bani arfida*." In other words, this was their custom, and so the Prophet, even though it wasn't the custom of his people, indicated there was nothing that he saw they were doing wrongly and so permitted them to do that.

Transcription by Amina Nawaz. Edited by Karen Nooruddin.